

EMPLOYEE WITNESS # 1

DECLARATION OF [REDACTED]

I, [REDACTED], declare as follows:

1) I am over the age of 18, and competent to testify as follows, based upon my personal knowledge.

2) I am employed as Chief Chaplain of Service at the Veterans Affairs (“VA”) Maine Healthcare System, in Augusta, Maine, which is part of the Veterans Health Administration (“VHA”).

3) The VHA is the largest integrated health care system in the United States, employing more than 367,200 full time health care professionals and support staff, who deliver healthcare services to over 9 million veterans at 1,293 healthcare facilities throughout the United States. (See <https://www.va.gov/health/aboutvha.asp>).

4) In Maine, the VA Maine Healthcare System serves over 42,500 veterans at facilities in Bangor, Calais, Caribou, Lewiston, Lincoln, Portland, Rumford, Saco, and the facility in Augusta, where I am based. (See <https://www.maine.va.gov/about/index.asp>).

5) The VHA permits and freely grants exemptions and accommodations to healthcare employees with sincerely held religious objections to mandatory vaccinations, including COVID-19 vaccination.

6) The VHA form for requesting and obtaining a religious exemption and accommodation from its mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy is very simple, and requires employees only to check a box indicating that they have a deeply held religious belief that prevents them from receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, and that they have notified their immediate supervisor in writing of that belief. Here is a true and accurate copy of the VHA exemption form:

July 27, 2021

VHA DIRECTIVE 1193(1)
Appendix B

☒ I notified my immediate supervisor in writing that I have a deeply held religious belief that prevents me from receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. I understand that by declining to receive the vaccine within eight weeks of publication of this directive, or within eight weeks of beginning employment, I must wear a face mask according to requirements and guidelines within VHA Directive 1193, Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Program for Title 38 Health Care Personnel.

Supervisor Signature: [Redacted] Date: 8-16-2021 Supervisor Email: [Redacted]

I have read and fully understand the information on this form and have been given the opportunity to have my questions answered. I understand that violation of the directive may result in disciplinary action up to and including removal from Federal service.

Name (print): [Redacted] Last 4 SS#: [Redacted]

Dept./Serv: Chaplain Service

Employee Signature: [Redacted] Date: 13 AUG 2021

VHA Title 38 HCP are to provide this form to the VHA facility Employee Occupational Health Office. Secure electronic submission is permissible.

7) Once a VHA employee checks the box and completes the exemption form, he or she is automatically exempted from the mandatory vaccination policy, and permitted to continue in the same job function, with the same duties and responsibilities. The only requirement (or accommodation) for exempt employees is that they must wear a face mask according to requirements and guidelines within VHA Directive 1193, as stated on the exemption form above.

8) On August 13, 2021, I submitted the above exemption form.

9) On August 16, 2021, my exemption was formally acknowledged.

10) With my religious exemption in place, and with the face mask accommodation, I am permitted to carry out my duties and responsibilities to the same extent as always. I interact

and counsel patients, both inpatients and outpatients, both with COVID and without COVID, in the entire hospital in Augusta, as well as other facilities. I interact and counsel with other healthcare workers routinely as well.

11) As part of my counseling of other healthcare employees within the VA Maine Healthcare System, I became personally aware of more than 100 other employees with sincerely held religious convictions that prohibit them from accepting vaccinations. These employees requested and obtained religious exemptions from the mandatory COVID-19 vaccination requirement using the same form and procedure that I did. These employees are permitted to continue their duties and responsibilities, including direct patient care, to the same extent that they did previously, subject to the masking accommodation described above.

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Dated: September 16, 2021

